

“A TIME TO WEEP”

A SERMON

ON

THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN

DELIVERED APRIL 29, 1865

IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
FREDERICK, MD.

BY THE PASTOR

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ONLY a few days have passed since the iron tongue of thousands of bells rang out the glad sound of victory, and gladdened us with the prospect of an early termination of the strife which for years has been raging. Quickly, loudly, did these bells respond to the feelings of our joyous hearts. Now with slow, measured strokes, they speak in response to changed emotions. But yesterday innumerable loud-mouthed, iron-throated cannon poured forth exultant sounds, which went rolling over city and town, hill and valley. Bands added to the general rejoicing by discoursing the National airs. The dear old flag, which had been torn down by traitors' hands and shot away by hostile bullets, had been lifted to the breeze, never, we hope, to be removed. Smiles adorned the faces of our people, and words of hope and encouragement were exchanged. O! how happy we felt in the prospect of peace, an honorable peace. Day after day, did we hear, with pleasure, the good news of the capture of large towns, and the surrender of large bodies of men. “The war is over.” “The rebellion is at an end,” were the expressions on the lips of thousands. Our sun shone brightly. Our political sky was almost free from clouds. But today, the nation is clothed in sackcloth, and sorrow is in our hearts. We all feel that it is time to weep. A thick, black cloud has gathered in our sky. Our faces bear the marks of sadness. Expressions of joy have ceased. “The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. The joy of our heart is ceased, our dance is turned into mourning.” Our hearts are faint through sorrow. Our eyes are dim by reason of weeping. Why this change? Has the cause of our joy ceased? No. Peace seems as near as it did a week ago. Were we deceived by false news? No. All the victories we rejoiced over were real. Indeed, other successes have been added to those we have celebrated. We

weep, not because we have lost the victories gained. It is not the absence of good tidings, which makes this a day of weeping. Sad news, blended with announcements of a pleasing character, makes us weep today. The whole nation has heard that our beloved President, Abraham Lincoln has passed away. It is his death, which has brought us to the house of God in the middle of the week. On account of his death, a tolling, instead of a joyous, quickly-sounding bell, summons us together. Our grief is all the deeper because of the suddenness with which he was cut down. It had not been announced to the nation that he was sick; or else, the tidings of his death would not have shocked us as they have done. The first news was told in the harsh ungrateful, sorrow-producing words, "He is dying". Then soon over the wires flew the message, "He is dead." Dead! Yes, dead! He did not die by disease; nor yet, by accident. He died by the hand of the assassin. How can we speak of the foul deed? We do not desire to indulge in extravagant remarks for this is not the time for them. Yet our feelings will hardly allow us to speak with moderation. Can we look upon the corse, the mangled corse of our honored chief, and not cry for vengeance upon the perpetrators of the bloody deed? Have we another chief to take the place of him who has fallen? Look to see him made the mark for the weapon of the assassin, if the murderer is not soon detected, and punished. Justice ought to be nimble-footed lest other men, whose efforts are invaluable to us, should be slain.

Sad, sad services claim our attention at this time. The statesman, the soldier, the minister, the private citizen, gather around the remains of our President, at the Capital at this time, and the churches all over the land, are filled with mourning hearts. Our grief is greater than our joy. The two emotions of gladness and sorrow cannot possess the heart the same time. The nation mourns today. It is a time to weep. It is a great grief, participated in by all, which distresses us today. We feel this more deeply than any we have had during these four long years of war. And why

is it so great? Why does the nation, this day, manifest more sorrow over the death of one than over the multitudes who have been slain on their country's altar? We all mourn the loss of brave men who have fallen in battle; but there is a difference between the loss of many from the ranks, and the death of one President. One great and good man, wisely administering the affairs of the nation, is worth many whose training and position prevent them from exerting much influence. The price of victory is the blood of many who move in the humbler walks of life. Individual hearts, here and there through the country are torn, but the heart of the nation rejoices over the victory, the result of their efforts. Parents, and wives, and children, here and there through our country with bleeding hearts are weeping, while the ruler of a great people falls all hearts are saddened. The whole nation mourns. It seems as though one were dead in every house. There are no exceptions to the general grief; unless they be found among those who love the name of rebel, or act the part of traitor.

This day, we see the legitimate fruits of rebellion. For a period of four years it has defied the authority of our government. For four years, it has invented the terrible instruments of death, which have been hurled at us in vast numbers. For years has it been starving our brave men, who, by the events of battle, have fallen under its control. It is the rebellion, which has brought untold woe upon a prosperous people. But recently, it has descended to a deeper point in its baseness. We had thought, from late events, that it had put forth its foulest and mightiest effort. But we were mistaken. Hecatombs of men were not enough to meet its demands. Its iron heart was not melted by the tears and sighs of thousands of widows and orphans. It relented not at the sight of want, and disease, and desolation. Like a great fiend from the pit of darkness, it ventures away, and goes forth from its dungeons, its blackened fields, the cries of anguish; and comes to the heart of the nation when it is bounding with joyous emotions, and strikes a fatal blow. Its efforts have culminated in a blow aimed

directly at the arm of power. It had aimed to overthrow the national authority by the aid of armies. But in this it failed. Now it leaves this indirect method of attack, and rushes forth to strike down the representative of the authority. Some, no doubt, will attempt to show that the South had nothing to do with this act; but, we think, no one can deny that the murderer was prompted by the same spirit, which raised and held together the armies of the rebellion. Men will try to palliate the offence by striving to make it appear that the assassin was insane; but the plans were too skillfully arranged, and too long in contemplation, to make that plea of any avail. It was a sly, miserable emissary of the rebellion who did the guilty deed. It was a plotting, cunning wretch, deeply in sympathy with the rebellion, who sought the President's life.

The consequences of his act will reach every part of our nation. The loyal people will feel its loss, in that we will not have his mind to direct, and his great, kind heart to prompt to benevolent action. Great difficulties are to be adjusted, and he seemed peculiarly qualified by God for their settlement. He took large, humane, comprehensive views of the difficulties. The good of the whole nation was in his mind. The people of the South will also feel his loss. At no time, has he shown any bitterness to them. Under his rule, the men who fell into our hands as prisoners were treated with great kindness. His magnanimity has been shown in his whole course, but especially, in the surrender of the great army of the rebellion. Where is the man even in the South, who could, with any show of reason, hate him? In all his public acts he seems to have been lifted above the fitful gusts of passion, which seemed to control other men. In this we conceive is found much of the grandeur of his character. He disdained to meet the foe with measures prompted merely by passion. He seemed always to keep in mind what was worthy of the great American Nation, instead of what sectional prejudice and hate demanded. Disturbed as we are by great gusts of passion, it might be supposed that

he was of necessity influenced by the same; but he seemed to live above it.

We know there are some, who think he had dealt most too leniently with those who have risen up in rebellion. He felt, no doubt, that this great people could afford to treat the vanquished foe with mercy and kindness. He knew that every eye was fixed upon his conduct; and that the public claimed, and exercised the right of judging his actions. He acted, therefore, in such a way as to gain the approval of those who are humane and lenient, and at the same time, firm, and just, and wise. His example had a great effect upon the people of the loyal States, as is exhibited in the kindness shown to the captured cities of the South. It did much also in the South in removing bitterness from the minds of the people. Indeed we see in Mr. Lincoln's course a great exhibition of benevolence. The armies of the nation did their part well. The kindness of our President did much also. We are not able to estimate what good has been done by his wise, prudent kind course. Some at the North may have felt like condemning his course, and now in his death fancy they see the bad effects of his kindness; but let them go to the vanquished and they will find they were beginning to love him, and to respect the authority he represented. We think if he could speak to us today he would urge us to use moderation. We are confident that his advice to us would be, "Deal with those who are fighting against you, as I have dealt with them." Let us therefore emulate the heinous crimes as treason and murder should be severely punished, let us exercise as much moderation and kindness as justice and wisdom will allow. It would ill become us to act toward the people of the South merely as passion dictates. Dreadful consequences would be the result. It would ill become the minister of the Gospel, on this day of sadness, to inflame the public mind with revenge, and incite to deeds of violence. We know that such a course, on the part of the minister, would be more acceptable to some than his counsels of moderation. The ministry of our country, on this day when all hearts are overwhelm-

ed with grief, wields a mighty power. We feel, as deeply as any, the enormity of the guilt of those who are linked with this foul sin, but we pray God to keep us from following the guidance of passion as we lead the service of this day. We dwell more especially upon this, because we know, that in the present state of the public mind, very little would lead men to deeds of violence. A few earnest, eloquent words for the purpose of stirring up the feelings of the people may bring about that result. In the name of the departed President, we beg you to refrain from every act, which is prompted by bitter exasperated feeling. While we revere his memory, let us look to God to bless his successor with his favor. Already has he entered upon his office. Let him receive your most cordial support. He is our Chief Magistrate. To him we now look, under the guidance of God, to bring us out of these troubles, through which we are passing. We should pray to God to fill him with the right spirit. He has great responsibilities resting upon him. He needs your prayers. He needs the support of the nation. It is a great satisfaction to all, to know that the wheels of government are rolling on as though our Chief had not fallen. In other lands there would have been, probably anarchy and confusion. But as far as the government is concerned, it is moving on as heretofore. What a great lesson does this teach other powers.

Andrew Johnson is now President of these United States. To the government which he represents you owe your allegiance. To him as the representative of this great government you owe respect and honor. "He is the minister of God to thee for good." "Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." Let us therefore speak of him in a respectful manner, and do all we can to prompt others to do the same. Those in the midst of us, who have adhered to this wicked rebellion, ought, at once, to abandon it. They see what terrible fruit it is producing. If men persist in adhering to it, even after what they have seen, we feel sure its worst fruit has not yet been produced.

We see what mischief can be done in what we suppose are the closing hours of the rebellion. If it had not committed a single deed of violence beyond this the assassination is enough to brand the cause with eternal infamy. If it had not fired a gun, or drawn a sword, this one act is enough to make it detestable. We cannot blot the last four years from our memory. But if we could, and it were possible to look upon this great murder as the only act which the people attached to the rebellion had committed, we feel that it is enough to make all right-thinking men withdraw their support. Can any cause be good, which is supported by the act of a miserable assassin? Can the spirit of secession be worthy of entertainment, when it sets men to plotting in secret for weeks and months, as to how they may murder a noble benevolent ruler? Can that cause be good, which by this fact, attempted to produce anarchy and confusion? God, in his goodness, has not permitted all to come to pass, which these bad men designed. They intended to take the life of him who has just entered upon the office of President, as well as the lives of those who form his cabinet. The lives of these men, we believe, are in constant jeopardy. They occupy a perilous position. The rebellion is today inspired with the spirit of murder. Murder in its foulest forms is plotted by it. If there be one in the sound of my voice, who countenances this terrible iniquity, let me say that he cannot exonerate himself from the guilt of the sins it may commit. Those who sympathize with traitors will offer excuses for their feelings and prejudices; but they are, without doubt, encouraging a cause which is prompted and sustained by murder. In the eye of the law, the man is regarded as an accomplice who gives the least aid or countenance to crime. We speak calmly and with deliberation, when we say that every man who sympathizes with rebellion, ought at once, to give it up. We have seen enough of its spirit. We need not want to see more. But if any still cling to it, we charge them with sustaining the foulest iniquity. We warn such, this day of sorrow, of the consequences of adhering to this great wickedness. We tremble now for the

man who boldly announces his attachment to this cause. There is danger to be feared, today, lest the angry passions of men lead them to deeds of violence. If the people, who adhere to this wickedness, want other manifestations of its spirit, we believe they will have them. The thunder-bolt of the accumulated wrath of an outraged people will fall upon their heads. We counsel those who give aid or the least countenance to the South to give up immediately. We urge loyal men, who have been true in the dark days through which we have passed to act with moderation. You have been treated with the greatest indignity. Great has been the peril through which you have passed. But notwithstanding all this, receive with fraternal kindness the man who heartily repents of his sin. Do not, do not we beseech you act according to the promptings of passion. Imitate the benevolence of him whose name we will ever hold in grateful memory. Deal kindly where you can. Be severe where justice and right say you must.

Death has laid his hand upon the strong, and noble man. His tall form has fallen. The eye, which looked out kindly upon all mankind, is closed. Death has mounted the high places of our nation. Where thronged the bright and joyous are now found the mourners. The wail of stricken ones is now heard where the song and shout resounded.

Abraham Lincoln is dead. It is a time to weep. In the midst of our greatest gloom, let us never lose sight of the fact, that God is on the throne. In the darkest hour, may we have unshaken confidence in His willingness and power to maintain the right, and overthrow the evil. To him we look in this time of weeping, and pray that out of this dispensation of His Providence, may soon come that which will be of great benefit to us. We humbly pray God to bless our time of weeping to our good. We do not pretend to understand this dispensation of Providence, but we do know that all things will work together for good to the cause of truth and righteousness.

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